



News Release

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86% of Michigan Districts Offer Some In-Person Instruction At the Beginning of the Year

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LANSING – Eighty-six (86) percent of Michigan school districts will offer some or all instruction in-person at the beginning of the school year, according to a study of local school district return to learn plans conducted by Michigan State University, the Michigan Department of Education said today.

The [study](#) released today, conducted by Michigan State University's Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) in partnership with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), showed that 59 percent of Michigan school districts are offering students at least an option to return to school five days a week, and 27 percent of districts are providing students with the ability to return to schools at least two to three days a week.

"It is critical that our students and staff mask up. With masks and other careful mitigation strategies, many children will have the opportunity to learn in person at the beginning of this school year," said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. "With schools abiding by the requirements and many of the recommendations in the MI Safe Schools Roadmap, teaching and learning in school are a viable option for many Michigan kids as the school year starts."

Researchers from EPIC collaborated with the Michigan Department of Education to read, analyze, and code contents of 823 Return to Learn plans submitted by Michigan school districts as of August 17, 2020, which represents 99 percent of all 832 traditional and charter school districts in the state.

The study identified the various modes of instruction that districts are planning to provide to begin the school year: fully in-person, fully remote/online, or a hybrid.

Dr. Rice noted that to offer instruction primarily at a distance doesn't preclude the offering of small classes of children in school with masks, social distance, and other mitigation efforts.

"In phases 4 and 5, local districts must craft and implement plans that best serve the needs of their individual communities," he said. "Every district, every public school academy, is unique. These are difficult times that require difficult decisions made at the local level, collaborative decisions that must include the voices of educators, students, parents, unions, administrators, and the broader community."

"That said, even schools and districts that are largely educating children at a distance may still provide in-school instruction for small groups of children with profound special needs, beginning English language learners, emerging or fledgling readers, and others who will struggle with remote or virtual instruction," Dr. Rice said. "We must do what we can, where and when we can, to meet the needs of our most educationally vulnerable students. These young people require our special reflection and attention."

Dr. Katharine Strunk, the director of EPIC and a professor of education policy and economics at Michigan State University, agrees. This was in fact a main point from a letter signed by approximately 500 researchers and co-authored by Strunk.

Dr. Strunk said, "The pandemic is disproportionately harming groups that are traditionally less well served by our schools across the country, including low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners, and homeless students. It is critical that we support these young people, even or especially in the midst of a pandemic."

Governor Gretchen Whitmer's Executive Order 2020-142 required districts to indicate what policies and procedures will be followed if/when the Michigan Economic Recovery Council (MERC) region in which the district is located is in Phases 1-3, Phase 4, and Phase 5 of the Michigan Safe Start Plan.

Eighty-four percent of districts that submitted Return to Learn Plans are located in Phase 4 regions, while the remaining 16 percent are located in Phase 5 regions. EPIC and MDE collected data pertaining to districts' plans for both of these phases and then analyzed how districts are expected to reopen based on their current phase.

"There are regional patterns in districts' reopening," Dr. Strunk said. "For instance, districts in Phase 5 are more likely to offer fully in-person or the option for in-person schooling. By contrast, over a quarter of districts in the Lansing region plan to offer all instruction remotely and districts in the Detroit region are twice as likely as districts across the state to offer hybrid instruction."

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Media questions on the EPIC report can be sent to Katharine Strunk at kstrunk@msu.edu